

WORKSITE journal



COMING TOGETHER WHILE STANDING APART

*Seven companies
reflect on a world
transformed*



SPECIAL EDITION



ONLINE NOW:

LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE GREAT CUSTOMERS BY WATCHING THIS VIDEO AT JohnDeere.com/worksitejournal

COMING TOGETHER WHILE STANDING APART

Return with us to revisit the offices, jobsites, and can-do mindsets of customers featured in previous issues of *Worksite Journal*.

LETTER FROM JUAN

SALUTING THOSE WHO KEEP THE WORLD RUNNING



During these unprecedented times, our customers have kept the world running while many others paused their lives and stayed home to protect those most in need. We salute those who make sure we have food, fuel, shelter, and infrastructure. Because as one of our customers told us recently, "When the world stopped turning, we didn't." Or to quote another, "The heroes through all this have been the ones who have adapted and stuck to it. Without people who continue to work in spite of all the fear, everything falls apart."

In the last few months, we decided to check in with a few customers who we profiled in past issues of *Worksite Journal* over the years. We wanted to see how they are adapting to a transformed world. What we learned shouldn't have surprised us. But the common themes we kept hearing are inspiring: that no matter what our circumstances, we can persevere. No matter how difficult the challenge, we can innovate and overcome. No matter what worrisome news another day brings, we can put on a hard hat, head out into the world, and make a difference.

Above all, we kept hearing about gratitude and humility, and about hope and optimism. Recent times have given us all time to reflect

and reevaluate our priorities about what truly matters. In these pages, you'll find stories not unlike your own, stories of the belief in our ultimate resilience and ingenuity. And of the conviction we will come out stronger in the end.

At John Deere, we will do our part to provide you with the tools and technology you need to forge ahead. Several of our customers expressed gratitude that we were able to extend no-payment/no-interest financing on all new Deere equipment for 90 days until June 30. And now through October 31, our new Own-It Offer provides special financing on select compact models to help you navigate the road ahead. See your dealer for details.

We will continue to stand behind you. Because as it turns out, keeping our distance has brought us closer together.

Juan Raya
Manager,
Global Compact Construction Sales



NO PAYMENTS / INTEREST
FOR **180** DAYS¹

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FOR 12 MONTHS¹

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PowerPlan.™

JohnDeereFinancial.com

¹Offer valid on qualifying purchases made between 1 July 2020 to 28 February 2021. Subject to approved credit on PowerPlan, a revolving credit service of John Deere Financial, f.s.b. For commercial use only. After the promotional period, interest charges will begin to accrue at Prime plus 14.9% APR. 1.9% APR is for 12 months only. 0% APR for 180 days and 1.9% APR for 12 months offers require a minimum \$3,000 purchase with at least \$1,000 of the purchase being parts. Repairs must be made to John Deere equipment using John Deere OEM parts. Prior purchases are not eligible. Available at participating dealers. Prices may vary by dealer. CR2110926 Litho in U.S.A. (20-06)



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Check out the video at:
[JohnDeere.com/worksitejournal](https://www.johndeere.com/worksitejournal)

Photography throughout this issue was taken prior to the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in North America.

7
COMPANIES



1
**COMMON
GOAL**



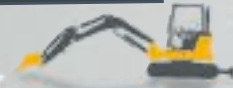
**ADAPT
— AND —
OVERCOME**

COMING TOGETHER WHILE STANDING APART



LYNN MILLER
Owner, Miller Earthworks

Partridge, Kansas



We recently checked in with customers we profiled in past issues and gathered their inspiring stories.

Our customers all play a part in transforming and building upon the land to meet the world's increasing need for food, fuel, shelter, and infrastructure. To celebrate their accomplishments, we recently reached out to a few customers we profiled in past issues of *Worksite Journal*. We wanted to check in and see what they've been up to since we last visited. And we wanted to see how they've adapted to a world transformed by the COVID-19 outbreak.

When the ball dropped on New Year's Eve to bring in 2020, many of these customers shared an optimistic outlook about a healthy economy and the coming year. Much changed when America hit the pause button in March, and restaurants, hair salons, retail stores, gyms, movie theaters, and many other businesses closed their doors. Major sports were put on hold. Everyone came together in shared sacrifice for the common good of helping our most vulnerable. In a time of much



CHRISTY WEBBER
Owner, Christy Webber Landscapes

Chicago, Illinois

RAFAEL, RUBEN SR., AND RUBEN DIAZ JR.
Owners, Diaz Group

Chicago, Illinois

MICHAEL FREEMAN AND DANNY RAYNES
Owners, Benchmark Utility Services

Sterling, Virginia

MATT LOVELL
Owner, MCL Construction

Athens, Alabama

SHAUN GONZALES
Owner, Weaver Environmental
Services Company, Inc. (WESCO)

Huntsville, Alabama

CHASITY CROWE-MOORE
Owner, Americ Equipment Rental

Hartselle, Alabama

uncertainty, the customers profiled in the following pages soldiered on. They were considered essential businesses because they built shelter; they provided water and sewer; they helped deliver data infrastructure and power; or they supported farms, grocery stores, and other key businesses.

These customers all adapted and persevered. They overcame fear, rolled up their sleeves, and went to work. They are grateful for having work and for the

health of their employees and families. And they share optimism that we will all come out of this stronger. It turns out, keeping our distance has brought us closer together.

We celebrate you and hope you enjoy these stories, which are probably not unlike your own. We're thankful to all of you unsung heroes for your dedication and the sacrifices you continue to make to keep the world running.



DIAZ GROUP

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



Winter 2017

RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE

After Rafael and Ruben Diaz Jr. finished college in 2007, their father Ruben Sr. fulfilled his promise of going into business with them, forming Diaz Group. The trio started out with a dump truck, a pickup truck, and loads of ambition. Thirteen years later, the full-service Chicago-area landscaper has succeeded beyond everyone's wildest dreams, employing over 60 people and running more than 50 John Deere G-Series Skid Steers and Compact Track Loaders.

Family means everything to the Diazes. Every night before the pandemic the extended clan would gather at Ruben Sr.'s for a huge home-cooked meal. "We're very family oriented and we try to make

that part of our company's culture," says Rafael Diaz, company president and father of five. "We want them to feel part of something special — that they are family."

Social distancing has been tough for the Diaz family since Illinois' stay-at-home order went into effect from March 21 through May 29. "Our company culture is very close, so how do you not shake hands or give someone a high five?" says Diaz. "I was raised to demonstrate my appreciation for people. It was challenging, but we understood the point of it, and we adapted. We just have to be careful, follow the proper steps, and use common sense."

The company quickly set up virtual shop so everyone could work remotely. "We had done some of the IT work before, so it was easy to scale up," says Diaz. Landscape drawings were shared via videoconferences instead of in face-to-face meetings. Proposals and agreements were handled remotely using PDFs and DocuSign*.

"Our industry is going to be survival of the fittest of who can adapt to the virtual age," says Diaz. "I believe we do a good job of that and are getting better every day."

Initially Diaz found it challenging to provide leadership remotely. "Our culture is very tight, so it was hard for me. How



As humans, we can adapt to whatever is thrown at us. Even during the pandemic, nothing stops us from doing what we have to do. That gives me hope."

— Rafael Diaz, president, Diaz Group



do I engage with and motivate my office staff? How do I lead through a computer? I'm getting the hang of it, but I'm glad that people are returning to the office."

The crews quickly adapted to social distancing and other requirements. "We thought some of the guys would be scared and not want to work, but the attitude was, 'We want to work. We'll be careful. Let's give this a shot.'"

Diaz found the whole experience challenging and humbling. "We went from being really optimistic about 2020 to watching our state close down and wondering if we could stay in business."

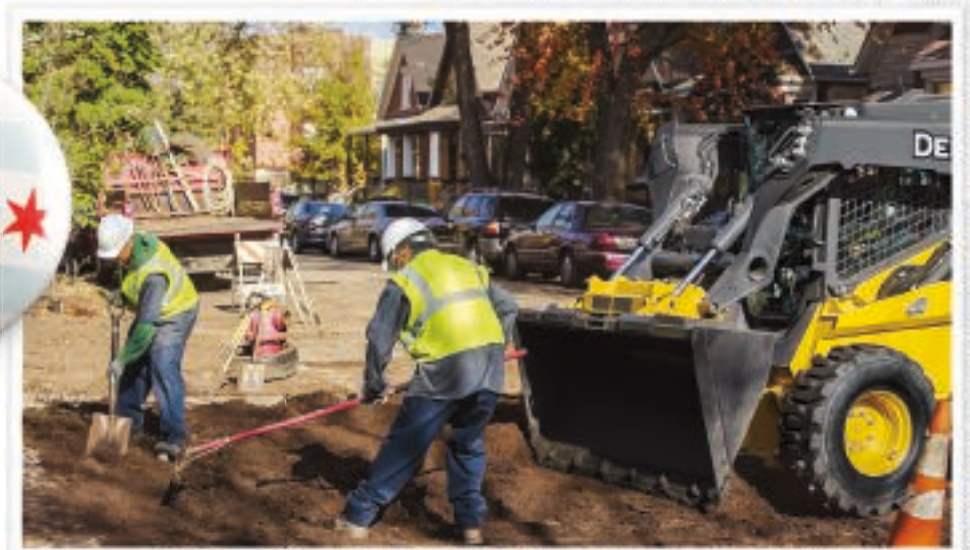
You have to keep an eye on your competitors and so many other things to stay in business. But a pandemic? That was out of left field."

But Diaz has found plenty of reason for optimism. "As humans, we can adapt to whatever is thrown at us. Even during the pandemic, nothing stops us from doing what we have to do. That gives me hope. As long as I see semis rolling down the highway, I know we're good. I'm grateful that as a company we have risen to this challenge."

Diaz Group LLC is serviced by West Side Tractor Sales, Naperville, Illinois.

Our industry is going to be survival of the fittest of who can adapt to the virtual age. I believe we do a good job of that and are getting better every day."

– Rafael Diaz, president, Diaz Group





CHRISTY WEBBER LANDSCAPES

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



Fall 2015

BRINGING GREEN SPACE TO CHICAGO



Our residential business really started to pick up. People felt if they were going to hang out in their backyards, they might as well complete some projects. So we picked up three or four quarter-million-dollar residential jobs.”

— Christy Webber, owner, Christy Webber Landscapes

The main office of Christy Webber Landscapes resides in Chicago’s West Side, but you wouldn’t know it. Owner Christy Webber can often be found running around the lush 12-acre site on an all-terrain vehicle when she’s not tending to goats, sheep, or chickens. “I feel like I’m out in the country,” she says. “I’m so happy out here.”

Webber started her landscaping business in the late 1980s with little more than a mower and a broken-down truck. Since then, Christy Webber Landscapes has grown into a full-grown landscape provider offering design, construction, and maintenance throughout Chicago. High-profile contracts and projects include iconic Windy City landmarks such as the United Center, Soldier Field, Wrigley Field, Millennium Park, Maggie Daley Park, McCormick Place, Navy Pier, and Grant Park, which includes Shedd Aquarium and The Field Museum. The company currently employs 400 people and last year earned a record \$46 million.

In January 2020, Webber had high expectations for another successful year. But everything changed when Illinois’

governor issued a shelter-in-place order on March 21, which would extend through the end of May. “Everything stopped,” she remembers. “All the sports teams stopped playing, and hotels and restaurants closed. Many commercial customers asked us to just barely mow the grass. We had to cancel all of our flowers — we make most of our money doing the other stuff besides mowing grass.”

The company immediately tightened its belt, canceling the purchase of trucks that were to be delivered through all divisions and departments to save money. Then something unexpected happened. “Our residential business really started to pick up. People felt if they were going to hang out in their backyards, they might as well complete some projects. So we picked up three or four quarter-million-dollar residential jobs.”

Business has thus far only slipped 10 percent, and the company budgeted to remain profitable. “Our people work really hard for me. I’m really glad we were able to keep things going so they could make a living. We’re a great team, and we’re all trying to do the right things.”

DEALER SPOTLIGHT

WEST SIDE TRACTOR SALES

Naperville, Illinois

Mother Nature is going nuts. Everything looks brighter and clearer. You can actually hear the birds near the expressway now. I love it."

– Christy Webber, owner, Christy Webber Landscapes

Webber takes pride in her company's diversity. She has offered an abundance of opportunities to African Americans. With her second-chance mindset, she has also extended employment to ex-felons seeking to reassert themselves into the workforce and has provided gender equality in high-ranking positions within the company.

Another unintended consequence of the lockdown has been nature, which has thrived with fewer cars on the road creating less pollution and noise. "Mother Nature is going nuts," says Webber. "Everything looks brighter and clearer. You can actually hear the birds near the expressway now. I love it. I'm a country girl at heart." Webber was born and raised in a small town in Michigan, where she now owns a cottage.

Creating green space in an urban area is what she does. "I've always felt I'm trying to help out Mother Nature," Webber says. "I love being outside, being a part of it. I love what I do."

Christy Webber Landscapes is serviced by West Side Tractor Sales, Naperville, Illinois.

CALM DURING THE STORM

Christy Webber of Christy Webber Landscapes took advantage of John Deere Financial's no-payment/no-interest financing on all new Deere equipment for 90 days that was available until June 30 to pick up a 644K Loader. The company also owns over 160 John Deere skid steers and compact track loaders. "I hadn't purchased a larger piece of equipment in many years," she says.

The company's local John Deere dealer, West Side Tractor Sales, provides service and support. "I have a great relationship with Sales Manager Adam Dudek," says Webber. "He's really stuck with us through thick and thin. I can always trust him to do the right thing."

Like Christy Webber Landscapes, West Side Tractor is a close-knit business. "I'm grateful for the family that I work for," says Dudek. "They made it clear from the beginning of the lockdown that our jobs were secure and we'd all get through this together. There was plenty to worry about, but they didn't flinch. They provided a sense of stability and loyalty that was comforting during a difficult time."



AL

AMERIC EQUIPMENT RENTAL

HARTSELLE, ALABAMA



Spring 2018

BOOSTING REVENUE AS DEMAND SHIFTS TO COMPACT EQUIPMENT



I realize how fortunate I am — it gets you thinking about the important things and helps you keep your priorities straight.”

— Chasity Crowe-Moore, owner, Americ Equipment Rental

Chasity Crowe-Moore started Americ Equipment Rental with the help of her father, Charles, in 1999. Over two decades, she's grown a successful rental business in Hartselle, Alabama, by developing personal relationships and having a great crew. She works hard and has earned the respect of her customers in a male-dominated industry.

Like many small business owners and single mothers, Crowe-Moore rises early to help her eight-year-old son Charlie get off to school before heading to the rental store. She also spends a lot of time with her 18-year-old stepdaughter Shelby. Balancing a busy schedule became more challenging when Alabama issued its stay-at-home order on April 4 and Charlie began completing school remotely from home.

“I hired someone part-time so I could help him with schoolwork,” she says. “I feel bad for Shelby, who is a senior, and she's missing out on prom, graduation, and all of those other senior-year activities. But I've really enjoyed spending the extra time with them. I realize how fortunate I am — it gets you thinking about the important things and helps you keep your priorities straight.”

Americ's customers include homeowners, light-commercial contractors, plumbers, and electricians. John Deere compact equipment is popular with these customers and accounts for a large share of the company's revenue. The company also generates about a fourth of its income from wedding-, party-, and event-rental equipment. But when the pandemic struck, events were cancelled, and that revenue went away.



“We lost that part of our business, but we saw a surprising increase in the rental of small machines among homeowners and contractors,” says Crowe-Moore. “With everyone being home, it seems like everybody wanted to do projects.”

With business being stronger than expected, Crowe-Moore took advantage of John Deere Financial’s no-payment/no-interest financing on all new Deere equipment for 90 days, which had been extended until June 30. The company purchased a 26G Compact Excavator and a 325G Compact Track Loader (CTL) to add to its fleet of five Deere compact excavators and three CTLs. “I was grateful Deere extended the program,” she says. “It made the decision a little bit easier.”

Crowe-Moore is also thankful that the rental of John Deere compact machines more than made up for the lost income from cancelled events. “I have friends in other businesses that have had to shut their doors at least temporarily. And that’s tough. We realize how fortunate we are to have maintained and even exceeded expectations. And we haven’t had to lay anyone off or scale back hours. It has truly been a blessing.”

Americ Equipment Rental is serviced by TriGreen Equipment, Huntsville, Alabama.

I have friends in other businesses that have had to shut their doors at least temporarily. And that’s tough. We realize how fortunate we are to have maintained and even exceeded expectations.”

***– Chasity Crowe-Moore, owner,
Americ Equipment Rental***



AL

MCL CONSTRUCTION

ATHENS, ALABAMA



Fall 2019

REFLECTING ON THE TRUE MEANING OF "SHELTER IN PLACE"

Matt Lovell, owner of MCL Construction, started his homebuilding business seven years ago when he finished 17 homes in a subdivision for a banker. Business took off from there. With a new automobile plant and other industry in the area, Athens, Alabama, experienced a housing boom. In addition to job opportunities, it's also an inexpensive and attractive place to live. "We can't keep up with demand," says Lovell. "Business has been really good."



MCL builds custom homes ranging from 1,200 to 4,200 square feet. All of Lovell's homes have buyers — he doesn't build spec homes — and his ability to stay on budget has delivered a steady flow of word-of-mouth customers.

At the start of 2020, MCL Construction had lined up many contracts for new homes, and Lovell was receiving multiple calls each week from people wanting to build. At the beginning of the pandemic, those calls slowed a bit. "But now we're seeing more calls than before. As the states open up again, we're struggling to keep up with demand."

During Alabama's shelter-in-place order, MCL Construction was able to continue to complete its contracts as an essential business. "Houses put a roof over people's heads, providing shelter from the storm and a safe refuge to those who are sick," says Lovell. "But ultimately a house is more than a mere shelter — it becomes a person's home."

Lovell is very hands on with his customers, although in this time of social distancing that means less face time. "I'm a custom builder so it's important for me to deal with my customers one on one. We're in contact throughout the process, though

now that means more by phone than in person. But they can call my personal phone any time."

Lovell understands the importance of everyone being there for one another. "Our healthcare professionals are heroes — especially the thousands of nurses working with people and risking their own health every day," he says. "And parents are heroes as well, taking time to help educate their kids at home. The pandemic has changed me — if I'm looking for a bright spot, I'd have to say it was spending a lot of time with my six-year-old and 12-year-old daughters on our horse farm. We've really been able to bond."

DEALER SPOTLIGHT

TRIGREEN EQUIPMENT

Huntsville, Alabama

These are challenging times, but they give me hope. Americans are keeping their heads up, coming together, and supporting each other. We're going to get through this, and I guarantee you, before you know it, we'll be even stronger than before."

— **Matt Lovell**, owner, MCL Construction

Lovell is also thankful for the work he does. "People here have the American Dream of owning their own home. I'm proud to be a part of that and really looking forward to the future."

Ultimately, these past months have taught him that we are all in this together. "These are challenging times, but they give me hope. Americans are keeping their heads up, coming together, and supporting each other. We're going to get through this, and I guarantee you, before you know it, we'll be even stronger than before."

MCL Construction LLC is serviced by TriGreen Equipment, Huntsville, Alabama.

UP AND AT 'EM

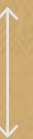
There are morning people and there are night owls. Doug Swaim, salesman, TriGreen Equipment in Huntsville, Alabama, is a morning person. "It's not unusual to receive an email from him that he sent at 4 am," says **Chasity Crowe-Moore**, owner, **Americ Equipment Rental**. "We've had such good luck with TriGreen. They're tremendous."

"He's been known to go into the office at 3:30 am, so he's pretty passionate," laughs **Shaun Gonzales**, owner of **Weaver Environmental Services Company (WESCO)**. "But he's awesome. He's been so great to deal with during the pandemic. If I need a part, I just call him and he tells me to pull up and get it curbside."

TriGreen quickly adapted to the changing landscape. The dealership put in plexiglass screens at the parts counters, and customers can call in or email their order or order online. Through a JDLINK™ connection, John Deere Connected Support™ enables remote machine monitoring and diagnostics.

"I don't know anyone who does it better than Doug and TriGreen," says **Matt Lovell**, owner, **MCL Construction**. "When the pandemic started, I had some questions about what equipment I could get to make things easier on the jobsite. I'm really appreciative of the time he spent with me. He was extremely helpful."

The feeling is mutual. "I see so many of my customers reaching out to help customers get through this," says Swaim. "I see them helping out financially or donating to a charitable cause. I see America come together more. We all have to turn off the news and just be thankful for what we've got."



AL

WESCO

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA



Winter 2019

DOING ITS PART TO KEEP UNDERGROUND UTILITIES GOING

Huntsville, Alabama, is known as the “Rocket City” for its long history with the U.S. space program. It’s also the Cotton State’s fastest growing city, spurred by burgeoning defense, aerospace, and other tech-related industries. As these companies flocked to Huntsville, Shaun Gonzales saw opportunity when he bought Weaver Environmental Services Company (WESCO) from his grandfather, James Weaver, 18 years ago. “He wanted to stay small and residential, but I really felt we could grow the commercial side,” he recalls. Over the last two decades, subdivisions began sprouting up all over, along with grocery stores, restaurants, and other businesses.

Today, the underground utility installation company employs 37 people and has more work than it could hope for. Recently WESCO has been working on numerous apartment and commercial building projects. “We’re extremely busy,” Gonzales says. “We’ve got a bigger backlog than we’ve ever had.”

Because the company installs water and sewer, it was considered an essential business when Alabama’s stay-at-home order went into effect on April 4. “You’ve got to have those working every day at homes and businesses,” says Gonzales. “But construction is just one part of it.

You’ve got to have first responders, doctors and nurses taking care of sick folks, grocery-store workers stocking shelves, and police officers maintaining order. We’re grateful we’re considered essential, but everyone has a place and is doing their job.”

WESCO was quick to adapt to the new world of social distancing and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requirements. They send crews straight to the job instead of holding large group huddles in the morning at the equipment yard. In the afternoon, everyone comes back at different times to refuel. At the jobsite, workers share plans on iPads instead of crowding around printed documents.



I’m glad we’ve been able to work, provide for our families, and do our part to keep the economy going. So many people are struggling, I feel truly fortunate we are able to do what we do. This is one of the strongest economies I’ve seen, so I’m optimistic it will bounce back.”

– Shaun Gonzales, owner,
Weaver Environmental Services Company

Social distancing hasn't been too difficult outside on construction jobs but has been more difficult for Gonzales from a social perspective. "I was raised to look someone straight in the eye and give them a firm handshake. That's what I've taught my son. Now if you stick out your hand, you might get a funny look. That's been tough."

But many of the changes have been for the better, he believes. "Some of the things we are doing now, we should have done for a long time, like using hand sanitizer and disinfecting doorknobs and light switches."

Gonzales' father is in the high-risk group should he contract COVID-19 as he was a smoker and has COPD. "Before Christmas he had pneumonia and was in the ICU for three weeks," says Gonzales. "He has only 17-percent lung function. He's doing okay now, but we've been really careful about keeping him safe."

Gonzales is grateful his family and workers have managed to stay relatively healthy. "I'm glad we've been able to work, provide for our families, and do our part to keep the economy going. So many people are struggling, I feel truly fortunate we are able to do what we do."

This is one of the strongest economies I've seen, so I'm optimistic it will bounce back."

Weaver Environmental Services Company, Inc. (WESCO) is serviced by TriGreen Equipment, Huntsville, Alabama.

We're grateful we're considered essential, but everyone has a place and is doing their job."

– Shaun Gonzales, owner, Weaver Environmental Services Company



KS

MILLER EARTHWORKS

PARTRIDGE, KANSAS



Fall 2018

REFLECTING ON THE “NEW NORMAL”

The new normal is going to be different. But it will be an improvement. Let's carry on with some of these positive things we've learned.

— Lynn Miller, owner, Miller Earthworks

Croplands sustain the rural economy of central Kansas, where Miller Earthworks carves out its living. “When farming is doing well, everyone does well, from excavation firms like ours to local restaurants,” says owner Lynn Miller. “When they are not doing well, it’s tough.”

When Kansas residents were ordered to shelter in place in response to the pandemic, those restaurants and other local businesses in Partridge, Kansas, shut their doors. With a high percentage of ag-related jobs, Miller Earthworks continued working as an essential business. “We’ve been able to work straight through,” says Miller. “We have a lot to be thankful for, we really do.”

The company has helped support restaurants by regularly ordering curbside takeout for the crew. “The heroes through all this have been the ones who have adapted and stuck to it,” says Miller. “The people who said, ‘We’re going to keep doing our thing because we have to.’ Restaurant owners, for example, either

had to close down or figure out a way to continue to serve their customers. Without people who continue to work in spite of all the fear, everything falls apart.”

Miller is also thankful that his family and workers have remained healthy. “Our employees have done a great job of showing up for work every day. They understand the seriousness of the pandemic but also understand that coming in helps us stay in business. I’m so grateful to my employees. And I’m indebted to customers who continued with projects and had faith we’d come through this okay.”

Miller is optimistic about the future. “Midwesterners are very resilient. You can’t keep us down. We’re going to keep putting our nose to the grindstone, because waiting around for something to happen comes at a cost. I can’t speak for the rest of the country, but I believe the economy will pick up here pretty quickly if we continue to work hard.”

“

Midwesterners are very resilient. You can't keep us down. We're going to keep putting our nose to the grindstone, because waiting around for something to happen comes at a cost."

– **Lynn Miller**, owner, Miller Earthworks

More time at home has given everyone time to think about what is really important, believes Miller. "I'm not talking about jobs. I'm talking about morals, about faith, and about family. What is really important — what should drive us. Maybe we don't need to work 24/7 and instead should spend more time with family. And maybe this will bring all of us closer together.

"The new normal is going to be different. But it will be an improvement. Let's carry on with some of these positive things we've learned."

Miller Earthworks is serviced by PrairieLand Partners, McPherson, Kansas, and Murphy Tractor & Equipment Co., Park City, Kansas.

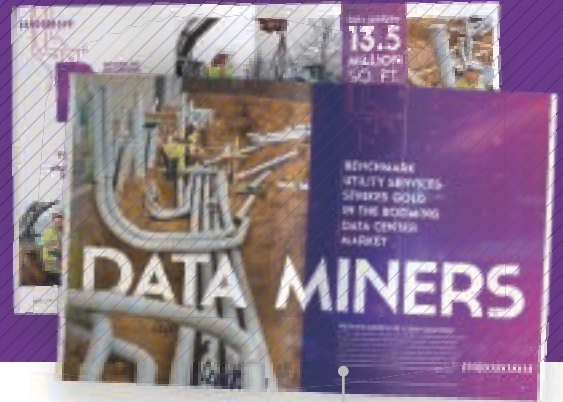


FEATURE #7

VA

BENCHMARK UTILITY SERVICES

STERLING, VIRGINIA



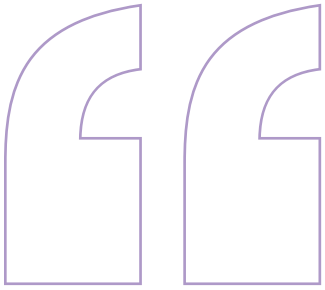
Fall 2018

HELPING AMERICA WORK AT HOME

*Over 70 percent of the world's internet traffic passes through Loudoun County, Virginia. With over 18-million square feet in operation and millions more in development, the county is home to the world's largest concentration of data centers. More than 70 of these massive, fortresslike structures have gone up in the last decade.**

*Sources: Loudoun County Economic Development and Loudoun Times-Mirror.





This is nothing like I've seen before — it's uncharted territory. But I'm cautiously optimistic we can reopen and bounce back if we all use common sense. — **Danny Raynes, CEO, Benchmark Utility Services**

Danny Raynes, CEO, Benchmark Utility Services, and his partner, Michael Freeman, COO, recognized this enormous business opportunity when they formed the company four years ago. In a short time, the underground utility company has grown into a \$40-million business with over 20 work crews and 190 employees. In addition to data centers, the company also works on new commercial and residential projects. And it has a power-company group working for Dominion Energy® in Northern Virginia. The company owns over 30 John Deere machines, from large excavators down to 35G Compact Excavators, 331G and 333G Compact Track Loaders, and 204K Compact Wheel Loaders.

When Virginia's stay-at-home order went into effect on March 30 (ending on June 10), Benchmark was considered an

essential business for helping maintain key communication and power company infrastructure. "Many people began working at home, and there will be a lot more working at home in the future, so it was important that these fiber networks run at full capacity," says Raynes.

Benchmark was quick to adapt to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC™) guidelines by checking employees' temperatures, maintaining social distancing, and making sure everyone wears face masks. "It's been challenging to be sure," says Niles Austin, CFO. "This came so fast, and there was so much dynamic change. We're very team oriented, and it's changed our working relationships with our workers on-site. Our office staff are working remotely, so interacting with customers is more challenging. But we've adapted and persevered."

"There has been so much uncertainty for all businesses as they wait to reopen," adds Raynes. "This is nothing like I've seen before — it's uncharted territory. But I'm cautiously optimistic we can reopen and bounce back if we all use common sense."

The support of the company's John Deere dealer, James River Equipment, has been critical. "When everything hit, we didn't have any financial burden, but we knew it could get rough," says Austin. "Our dealer told us, 'Look, we have your back. You let us know what you need, and we'll make it happen.' Thankfully, we've been making it through this okay, but that support is so important to us."

Benchmark Utility Services is serviced by James River Equipment, Manassas Park, Virginia.



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— **Danny Raynes, CEO,**
Benchmark Utility Services





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